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Changes in migration patterns during the economic crisis – impact on the migration flows to Norway

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Summary

The paper analyses the impact of the economic crisis on the migration flows to Norway in general and with a special focus on labour immigration. The economic crisis has had a considerable impact on the migration flows in Europe, but not all countries were affected evenly.

The paper is presented for discussion to the Conference of European Statisticians seminar on migration statistics.

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I. Introduction

1. Immigration to Norway has increased rapidly in recent years. A large part of the increased immigration to Norway is caused by labour immigration. The other main categories are family migration, refugees and education. The high immigration level is to a large extent caused by the favourable economic situation in Norway in recent years, with one of the lowest unemployment rates and highest income levels in the world.

2. Although Norway is not a member of the European Union (EU), it is part of the European Economic Area (EEA) and consequently part of the common European labour market. Norway is, thus, affected by migration flows in Europe just like any other EU country. Through Norway's membership in the EEA, citizens of EU member countries have almost unrestricted access to work and life in Norway. The immigration growth has been particularly high for immigrants from Poland and the Baltic countries.

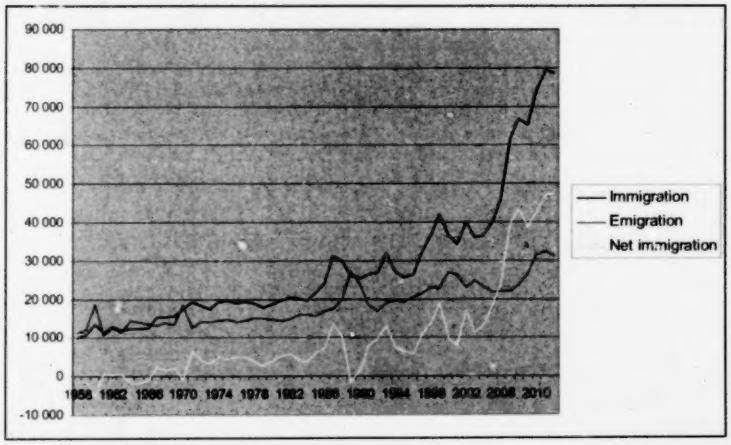
3. The economic crisis struck the world economy in mid-2008. After many years of relatively high growth of the economy and employment, the global economic crisis had a negative impact on most of the European countries.

4. This paper will look at the impact of the crisis on the migration flows to Norway, with a special focus on labour immigration. The economic crisis has had a considerable impact on the migration flows in Europe, but not all countries were affected evenly.

II. Immigration to Norway- a short historical overview

5. While historically Norway was a country with more emigration than immigration, the opposite has been true more recently. Until around 1970, net migration to Norway was small. From around 1970, with the exception of 1989, net immigration has been positive and gradually increasing (figure 1).

Figure 1.
Migration to Norway 1958-2012



Source: Population Statistics, Statistics Norway

6. During the recent decades, the main reasons for immigrating to Norway included: work, family, protection and education. At the beginning of 1970s, labour migration from developing countries, such as Pakistan, Turkey and Morocco, started, but was stopped by an "immigration halt" introduced by the Norwegian authorities in 1975 in order to regulate immigration. This restriction was aimed primarily at labour migration. From that time, family immigration from the same countries has increased considerably. In recent years, a larger share of family immigrants has been women, especially from Thailand and Philippines, that enter into marriages with men without having an immigrant background.

7. "Protection" characterizes an immigration wave started in the mid-1970s through the accepting of refugees from countries torn by conflict, particularly from Vietnam and Chile, then Iran and Sri Lanka in the mid-1980s. In the 1990s, war refugees from the Balkans formed the predominant group. Since the end of 1990s many refugees from Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan arrived.

8 Due to favourable lending and scholarships, there has been a degree of immigration for education and cultural exchange purposes since around 1980s. The latest figures indicate a moderate increase in the number of international students and au pairs in Norway (table 2).

9. Education and cultural exchange make up a modest share of the total immigration among non-Nordic citizens, approximately 9 per cent annually.

10. With the EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007, labour migration to Norway, and later also family related immigration, increased significantly. In the annual flows since 2006 "labour" has been the main reason for immigration to Norway, with "family" being the second most common reason (table 2).

III. Migration flows prior to and in the period of financial crisis

11. The impact of EU enlargement on migration flows to Norway has been noticeable already in 2006 when Norway experienced the highest immigration and net immigration ever. More than 45,800 immigrations were registered that year. Year 2006 is a special migration year for one more reason, after many years the nature of immigration changed from refugee and family related immigration to labour immigration. Immigration hit a new record in 2007 with 62,000 immigrations, an increase of more than 16,000 compared to 2006.

12. As these figures show, before the economic crisis hit Europe in early 2008, immigration flows to Norway increased considerably. The total inflow of immigrants to Norway in 2006-2007 hit record high levels, and most of the foreign immigrants came from EU/EEA area, around 63 per cent. The most significant contribution to this growth came from Poland. With 14,000 immigrations Polish citizens made up the largest group of immigrants in 2007, followed by Swedish, Germans, Danish and Lithuanians (table 1).

Table 1.

Immigration to Norway, by citizenship, 2006-2012

Citizenship	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Immigration to Norway, Total	**45 776**	**61 774**	**66 961**	**65 186**	**73 852**	**79 498**	**78 570**
Poland	7 425	14 160	14 437	10 451	11 347	12 861	11 477
Sweden	3 358	4 432	5 692	6 033	7 595	8 201	5 728
Germany	2 281	3 794	4 325	2 818	2 678	2 315	1 765
Denmark	1 493	1 464	1 345	1 288	1 373	1 590	1 779
Lithuania	1 332	2 350	2 851	3 196	6 552	7 743	6 600
Somalia	1 199	1 636	1 231	1 270	1 641	1 704	3 607
Russia	1 075	1 450	1 157	999	934	1 020	1 080
Philippines	1 057	1 615	1 765	1 673	2 126	2 553	2 490
Thailand	1 053	1 155	1 317	1 308	1 171	1 249	1 286
United Kingdom	971	1 144	1 249	1 256	1 462	1 519	1 408
Latvia	288	452	614	1 129	2 292	2 116	1 655
Eritrea	300	423	778	1 670	1 987	1 974	2 366
Island	251	276	347	1 584	1 678	1 726	1 450
Afghanistan	598	559	785	1 386	1 417	1 095	1 219
Romania	230	601	1 104	1 142	1 322	1 424	2 020
Spain	279	341	384	477	751	973	1370
Potugal	97	156	271	257	284	458	582
Greece	58	62	118	55	110	258	396
Italy	217	279	372	393	494	493	597

Source: Population Statistics, Statistics Norway

13. What was the main reason for immigration among these immigrants? Statistics Norway's official statistics on reasons for immigration provide an overview of the five most important reasons for persons to migrate to Norway: labour, family, protection, education and other immigration. Information about reasons for migration is derived from the Aliens register maintained by the Directorate of Immigration, and it only includes non-Nordic citizens.

14. Nordic citizens have the right to take up residence and work in another Nordic country without any permission, but they have to report their move to the authorities. For all other foreign citizens, as of 1990, the reason of immigration has been assigned. Information about the reason for immigration is available for almost 99 per cent of all first time non-Nordic immigrants.

15. The share of labour immigrants of all immigrants with a non-Nordic citizenship has in the period after the EU enlargement and before the financial crisis increased from 19 per cent in 2004 to 48 per cent in 2007 (table 2).

16. "Labour" has become the major reason for immigration to Norway. Men made up a high share of persons who immigrated due to labour in this period, more than 80 per cent. Mainly young people immigrated to Norway as labour immigrants. As many as 8 out of 10 were younger than 40 years old.

17. Among immigrants with Nordic citizenship 9 out of 10 were younger than 40 years old, while gender distribution was more even than among non-Nordic citizens, with 54 per cent of men and 46 per cent of women. Statistics Norway does not have statistics on the reasons for immigration among Nordic citizens. Labour statistics indicate a high employment rate among Nordic neighbours residing in Norway.

Table 2
Immigration #1 by reason for immigrating and year of immigration, 1990-2012

Year of immigration	Total	Labour	Family	Refugee	Training #2	Other	Unknown reason for immigration #3
Total, 1990-2012	581 549	183 462	214 369	116 672	60 794	2 913	3 339
1990	11 055	1 027	4 567	4 278	975	208	-
1991	11 089	1 050	4 389	4 509	1 057	84	-
1992	12 234	1 152	4 896	4 997	1 138	51	-
1993	16 773	1 140	4 767	9 613	1 210	43	-
1994	11 348	1 215	4 242	4 596	1 225	70	
1995	10 222	1 427	4 335	3 085	1 296	79	-
1996	9 675	1 487	4 621	1 988	1 485	94	-
1997	11 541	1 858	5 870	2 135	1 574	104	-
1998	14 359	2 508	6 777	3 137	1 834	103	-
1999	22 237	2 076	7 477	10 634	1 953	97	-
2000	18 964	1 997	7 607	7 143	2 131	86	-
2001	17 365	2 376	8 385	4 270	2 237	97	-
2002	22 673	2 706	12 839	4 492	2 526	110	-
2003	19 795	2 379	9 215	5 509	2 605	87	-
2004	21 218	4 063	9 229	5 071	2 759	96	-
2005	23 910	6 433	10 426	3 920	3 034	97	-
2006	29 504	11 778	11 253	3 132	3 237	104	-
2007	44 253	21 377	13 670	5 223	3 875	108	-
2008	48 410	23 205	16 760	4 274	4 052	119	-
2009	43 762	16 278	13 911	6 179	4 083	121	3 190
2010	50 251	23 690	14 847	6 172	5 270	123	149
2011	54 319	26 712	16 200	5 221	5 812	374	-
2012	56 592	25 528	18 086	7 094	5 426	458	-

#1 First time immigrations by immigrants (born abroad to foreign-born parents) with non-Nordic citizenship.

#2 Au pairs have training as a reason for immigration

#3 In total 3,339 persons from an EU/EEA/EFTA country have an unknown reason for immigration due to the new registration rule. For more information about right of residence in Norway for EU/EEA/EFTA nationals: http://www.udi.no/

18. For several years, family related immigration was the most important basis for long-term immigration to Norway, as we described in the previous section. The period from 2006 to 2007 was characterised by strong increase in labour immigration. However, the total number of family reunifications did not drop, but the share of family immigrants of all immigrants became lower. Major four countries of origin in 2006-2007 among family immigrants were Poland, Thailand, Germany and Somalia.

19. Asylum seekers who have been granted residence and resettled refugees constitute important categories of immigrants. In 2007, a total of 5,000 persons were registered with "protection" as the reason for immigration. Most of these immigrants came from Somalia, Burma, Chechnya and Iraq. The number of persons with "protection" as the reason for immigration has been stable since 2001, remaining between 4,000 – 5,000 residents. The

period of economic growth in Norway is not associated with a higher refugee admission to the country.

20. The economic crisis that started in 2008, also known as the global financial crisis, has been described as the most severe crisis since the great depression of the 1930s. How did it influence the migration flows to Norway?

21. The economic crisis led to a significantly slower growth in immigration in 2008 than in the previous year (table 1). Despite the slow growth rate in 2008, as compared to 2007, Norway experienced a record high immigration with 67,000 registered immigrations. Of those having citizenship other than Norwegian, 64 per cent were citizens of EU member countries. The corresponding share for 2006 and 2007 was 57 and 63 per cent, respectively. Polish citizens formed the largest group of immigrants in 2008 with 14,400 immigrations in total, they were followed by Swedish (5,700) and German citizens (4,300).

22. Immigration by citizens from countries in the Southern Europe that were hardest-hit by the economic crisis such as Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy was surprisingly modest in the period of the crisis (table 2). Around 1,000 persons immigrated from these four countries in 2008, and the same number of immigrations was registered in 2009.

23. Statistics on reasons for immigration show that both labour and family immigration among non-Nordic citizens was higher than before in 2008. Labour was the reason for immigration for almost half of the non-Nordic citizens, and one third came because of family (table 2).

24. The impact of economic crisis on migration flows to and from Norway was most visible in 2009. Norway experienced a drop in immigration from 2008 to 2009, particularly among labour migrants. At the same time the number of emigration among foreign citizens increased to a level that was highest ever registered by then: 3,200 higher than in the previous year and 6,000 higher than the average for the last 20 years. For the first time, Polish citizens formed the largest group of emigrants with 3,600 emigrations, followed by Swedish citizens with 3,100. The Polish citizens who emigrated in 2009 had an average period of residence in Norway of one year. Nine out of ten of them had immigrated in 2007-2009. The Swedish citizens who emigrated in 2009 had an average period of residence of around three years.

25. The change towards a lower immigration and higher emigration started at the end of 2008, and it was particularly noticeable during the first half of 2009. The drop in immigration is related to both labour and family immigration while immigration due to protection increased. The most important refugee countries in 2009 and 2010 were Eritrea, Afghanistan and Somalia.

IV. The period of recovery in 2010-2012

26. Although the inflow of labour and family migrants fell in 2009, this drop in immigration had a temporary character. Already in 2010 immigration increased to its highest annual level with 73,900 immigrations. The number of emigrations was also at the record level. The increase in 2010 was mainly due to increasing immigration of Polish and Baltic citizens. As many as seven out of ten immigrants to Norway were Europeans, which has been the case in recent years.

27. The same trend continued in 2011. In total, 79,500 immigrations and 32,500 emigrations were registered. Both of these figures were the highest ever recorded. Polish and Baltic citizens contributed with 44 per cent of the net migration. In 2011, the Swedish citizens formed the largest group of emigrants with 5,400 emigrations. Around 2,300 Polish citizens emigrated in the same period.

28. In 2012, 78,500 immigrations and 31,200 emigrations were registered. Although both of these figures were slightly lower than in 2011, the resulting net migration was still higher than in any previous year. The majority of foreign immigrants came from EU countries, but their share fell from 64 per cent in 2011 to 58 per cent in 2012. Poland continued to be the largest immigrant country, with 11,500 new persons, followed by Lithuania (6,600) and Sweden (5,700). There was a significant increase in immigrants from Somalia (3,600) and Eritrea (2,400).

29. Immigration of citizens from countries in Southern Europe with economic problems, such as Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italia, increased by 35 per cent from 2011 to 2012, but the numbers remained low (table 2).

30. Labour was the major reason for the non-Nordic immigration to Norway in 2012. This was the stated reason for 45 per cent, four percentage points lower than in 2011 (table 2). Yet, with more than 25,000 persons, the labour immigration was one of the highest ever recorded.

V. Summary

31. A reduced level of labour immigration in 2009 has quickly been replaced with an increase in 2010 and 2011 to the new record high levels. However, there was a slight reduction from 2011 to 2012 among non-Nordic labour migrants. In addition, there were many labour migrants from the other Nordic countries.

32. In the period of recovery after the economic crisis in 2008-2009, the migration flows to Norway have been characterised by an increase in both immigration to and emigration from Norway, with the exception of 2012. Yet, net migration reached a new record high, each year.

33. The increase in emigration is mostly concerned with the return to our neighbouring country, Sweden. Swedish emigrants have been clearly the largest group emigrating from Norway during the last two years.

34. We would like to draw attention to the challenges of registering outward movement. Statistics on immigrants and immigrations are based on information from the Central Population Register. Registration of emigration is not as reliable as registration of immigration, as some emigrants fail to report to the authorities upon departure from Norway. Persons who leave the country without reporting that they have moved have been a major source of error in recent years that have been characterised by high migration from EU to Norway.

35. For intra-Nordic migration this does not the pose a problem as individual migration data are exchanged between the population registers in the Nordic countries regarding changes of residence.

36. The increase of labour migration in the whole period has also generated an increase in family immigration, for example from Poland and Lithuania. Bringing family members into Norway can indicate an intention to remain in Norway for a longer period or permanently.

37. Migration flows to Norway have been affected by the economic crisis as of 2008, but the consequences have not been long-lasting. Norway experienced a temporary drop in both labour and family immigration from 2008 to 2009, but already in 2009 the immigration to Norway continues to increase. The impact of the economic crisis on emigration was also noticeable, but it has not caused major oscillations in migration flows. There were no significant changes in the composition of the main nationalities migrating;

Polish, Swedish and Baltic immigrants were the most dominant immigrant groups in the whole period, and labour remained the main reason for immigration through 2006-2012.

38. Immigration by citizens from countries in the Southern Europe that were hardest-hit by the economic crisis has increased from 2011 to 2012, but the number of immigrations remains modest.